ABOUT THE GUIDE

*How and why it was developed.*

In 2013 the ALA Washington Office conducted a survey regarding advocacy engagement in the library community. There were 1026 respondents, although not all respondents completed the entire survey. The bulk of respondents (66%) were library staff / directors. The breakdown of types of libraries / affiliations included 47% from public libraries; 31% from school libraries; and, 14% from college research libraries with the remainder being state librarians and those associated with specialized libraries. The age range of respondents broke down as follows: 26-34 (15%), 35-44 (17%), 45-54 (21%) and 55-64 (30%).

The survey data revealed eight key challenges members of the library community face in efforts to advocate. Among those who said they do not advocate, when asked why, the primary responses were:

1. No one has asked me to advocate
2. I don’t have time to advocate
3. I don’t know what to say
4. I’m not sure what to do
5. I’m unfamiliar with the audience
6. I don’t think I’m supposed to lobby
7. I’m not sure how to get my decision-makers to listen
8. I don’t know how to engage others to advocate with me

This guide seeks to delve into these challenges and to provide members of the library community with the resources they need to make sure their voices get heard—and listened to—among decision-makers.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

The last section in this chapter outlines why advocacy is important, along with basic policy information. Resources for more detailed / timely information on a given issue are noted throughout the document.

After the overview, the guide is organized by eight major challenges we uncovered as part of the survey. These are:
1. No one has asked me to advocate
2. I don’t have time to advocate
3. I don’t know what to say
4. I’m not sure what to do
5. I’m unfamiliar with the audience
6. I don’t think I’m supposed to lobby
7. I’m not sure how to get my decision-makers to listen
8. I don’t know how to engage others to advocate with me

While the majority of the resources in this document can be used by all members of the library community, there are some materials that will be specifically helpful for certain types of libraries as well as certain groups (i.e. friends, trustees, board members, and patrons) in the library community. Those specific resources are distinguished according to the colors in the box on the right. If a box has no color, the resources listed in it can be applied advocacy efforts across all types of libraries.

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

If you don’t have time to read the whole guide, we hope you will consider these quick-and-easy things you can do to make sure you’re getting more involved in library advocacy:

1. Sign up for Federal Action Alerts in the [Legislative Action Center](#).
2. Subscribe to [District Dispatch](#), the Washington Office blog, for updates on current policy and legislation information.
3. Take action for your local library and sign up for action alerts with your local state library association.
4. Calculate the value of your library using the [Library Value Calculator](#) and tell people how much you’re worth.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY AND WHY DO IT?

To engage in advocacy means to plead or argue for a cause, without reference to the particular audience. In other words, anything you do to promote the interests of your library can be
considered advocacy. This applies whether you’re working with elected officials, regulatory agencies or even the general public. In short, you likely already advocate on a daily basis.

The staff at ALA’s Office of Government Relations focuses on advocacy in the political arena, particularly the U.S. Congress, although issues can arise in regulatory agencies like the Federal Communications Commission or in the courts, as well. These staff people play an important role in monitoring legislation, working with legislators’ staff to change bills, propose legislative ideas, and engage in regulatory rulemakings. However, in order to be most effective, they need those who are directly impacted by the decisions to speak up. That’s where you come in.

Believe it or not, elected officials and their staff pay close attention to those they represent. According to recent studies, communications from constituents rank far above those of lobbyists in terms of their ability to influence a decision. Without your input, legislators and regulators have no idea if what they’re proposing is helpful or harmful. Part of your role is to be sure they know what you do in the community, why it’s important and what policy changes are necessary to help you further your goals. This guidebook will show you how.